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Rules of the Game
Types and Templates (Part One)
By Skip Williams

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The current **D&D** rules make extensive use of labels and categories. These groupings primarily serve to ease play by serving up complex ideas in manageable chunks. The game's most recent editions include a new kind of category -- the creature type.

Creature types aren't particularly mysterious or complex; unfortunately, game designers aren't always content to leave a creature's type alone. Creature types are maddenly subject to change and it's those changes that cause most of the problems that arise from creature types. In this series, we'll take a look at the nuts and bolts of creature types and consider what happens when a creature's type changes. Perhaps the most common method for changing a creature's type is applying a template, and we'll consider the ins and outs of templates as well.

Some Key Terms

Let's start with a brief list of the terminology used in this series.

Extraordinary Ability: A trick a creature can employ or special characteristic that it has. In either case, an extraordinary ability is strictly nonmagical; see page 289 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more details.

An extraordinary ability can spring from an obvious physical adaptation (such as a great cat's rake attack), from the inner working of its body (such as a troll's regeneration ability), or from an innate or acquired talent, such as a giant's ability to throw or catch rocks.

Kind: A particular sort or species of creature, such as orc, wood elf, or brass dragon.

Spell-Like Ability: A magical ability that mimics the effects of a particular spell. A spell-like ability works just like the spell it mimics in most ways. See page 289 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or *Rules of the Game: All About Spell-Like Abilities* for details.

Subtype: A fairly narrow category of creatures that share one or more subtle characteristics, such as resistance to a particular form of energy.

A subtype is always paired with a type, which represents a more basic category of creature. A creature can have no subtypes, one subtype, or a whole list of subtypes. Creatures with different types can also have the same subtype. For example, a red dragon (a creature of the dragon type) and a fire giant (a creature of the giant type) both have the fire subtype. In an earlier version of the game, subtypes were called type modifiers because of their ability to pair with different types.

A creature's subtype or subtypes often determine how magical effects or special attacks affect the creature.

Supernatural Ability: A magical ability that is unlike any spell. Supernatural abilities don't require preparation to use, are impossible to dispel, and nearly impossible to counter or disrupt. See page 289 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for details.

Template: A set of instructions for changing a creature's game statistics to reflect a life-changing event or the creature's particular history or origins. Templates come in two sorts: acquired and inherited.

Acquired templates reflect changes a creature undergoes after its birth.

A creature must be born with an inherited template.

Type: A broad category of creatures that have certain gross characteristics in common, such as anatomy, metabolism (or lack thereof), and propensity for language and social interaction.

A creature type includes basic game statistics, which are divided into features and traits. A type's features always include four key game elements: size of Hit Dice, base attack bonus, base saving throw bonuses, and skill points. A type's list of traits are less cut and dried than its features and can include senses (such as darkvision), weapon and armor proficiencies, languages, and basic biological details (such as the need to eat and sleep).

Every creature has one -- and only one -- type.

What's Next?

We're out of time for this week. Next week, we'll review basic creature types and consider a few related topics.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of **Dragon** Magazine for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the Monster Manual. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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